

Community resources

[Follow us on Twitter](#) [Check our Reddit](#) [Twitter this](#) [Digg this page](#) [Contact us on IRC](#)

courage is contagious

Viewing cable 09SOFIA362, BULGARIA: NEW CHOD, OLD MINDSET

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags #cablegate and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. #**09SOFIA362**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09SOFIA362	2009-07-07 08:56	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Sofia

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.bivol.bg/wlarmy.html>
<http://balkans.blog.lemonde.fr/2011/05/05/et-la-bulgarie-renonca-aux-corvettes-francaises/>
http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2011/05/05/1085393_kak_se_pileiat_pari_v_otbranata/

VZCZCXR08332
OO RUEHSL
DE RUEHSF #0362/01 1880856
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 070856Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6154
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEADWD/DA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFIISS/HQ USEUCOM IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000362

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2029
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: NEW CHOD, OLD MINDSET

Classified By: Ambassador McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The nomination of Simeon Simeonov as Chief of Defense (CHOD) is a testament to the lack of appetite for serious reform. In his previous position as Commander of the Air Force, Air Force modernization lagged far behind the

other services. A classic, myopic bureaucrat, he stifled innovation, failed to effectively leverage joint training opportunities with the United States and was unable to secure funds for his pilots to reach NATO standards for flight hours. He was routinely chastised for poor performance by the Minister of Defense.

¶2. (C) Simeonov's promotion was due largely to his close relationship with the President's Chief of Staff, Nikola Kolev (himself a former CHOD and Air Force Commander.) Kolev, and perhaps President Parvanov himself, seek to maintain control over the direction and speed of reform inside the MOD, by placing a malleable friend at the helm. The new CHOD fits this description, as do several other appointments controlling key nodes of the ministry, such as the new Inspector General and Joint Operations Commander, who both lack competence and integrity. The full list of senior promotions included a few bright spots, such as several IMET graduates and good embassy contacts, but the ability of these talented reformers will be limited by the dead weight now piled on top of them. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) The nomination of Simeonov for a three-year term as the new CHOD elicited groans throughout the international defense community in Sofia. Widely perceived as a failure in his previous position, the appointment was criticized in the media and scoffed at privately by Bulgarian career military officials. Defense Minister Tsonev made a statement to the press distancing himself from the decision and implying the responsibility for the nomination rested solely with the President. Technically, the nomination must come from MOD, be approved by the Council of Ministers and signed by the President, but in practice the Presidency is in a position to dictate in advance which candidates it finds acceptable. The Minister, whose own career is now uncertain following national elections, was not willing to directly challenge the President's choice, but took the opportunity to swipe at the new CHOD in public, saying that he hoped Simeonov could accomplish as CHOD many of the key Air Force reform priorities he failed to achieve as Air Force Commander.

¶4. (C) Two other appointments of concern are LTG Atanas Samandov as Joint Operations Commander and Major General Volodya Tsvetanov as the Chief Inspector. Samandov, who will be in charge of all Bulgarian military operations, including overseas missions in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, is not considered to be a top-performer and has been widely rumored to be involved in corrupt defense acquisition deals. Tsvetanov is a disturbing choice as Inspector General since he is also widely considered to be corrupt, and is the brother (with a different surname) of disgraced former Bulgarian Interior Minister Rumen Petkov, who resigned last year in a scandal over his links to organized crime. As part of the personnel moves, the previous Deputy CHOD VADM Lyutskanov and Joint Operations Commander LTG Pehlivanov, two close and constructive partners were removed from their positions, a deep net loss.

¶5. (C) Not all of the 30 or so general officer appointments were bad. Most were acceptable given the seniority and performance of the officers promoted. Four of the nominations are particularly good news, since they include smart, energetic reformers with international experience such as participation in IMET programs: Maj Gen Rumen Radev as Deputy Chief of the Air Force, BG Stefan Yanev as MOD Director of Security and Defense Policy, Maj Gen Konstantin Popov as Air Force Commander and RADM Plamen Manushev as Naval Forces Commander. We can expect continued support and cooperation from this group, but their ability to stimulate bottom-up reform will be limited as their superiors, particularly the new CHOD, will be able to stifle any moves contrary to their interests.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Despite our concern over three of the top appointments, the new crop of senior military officers will not prevent us from advancing our bilateral security agenda with Bulgaria. In practice, the Bulgarian Defense Staff (previously called the General Staff) are policy implementers not policy makers, so even the CHOD will not be able to

countermand clear political decisions on issues such as deployments to Afghanistan. The troubling appointments represent a missed opportunity and demonstrate the unconstructive influence of the President and his staff, who

SOFIA 00000362 002 OF 002

have not challenged crooked procurements (and likely benefited from them) or vigorously supported real reform. Progress on planning, training and procurement reform will depend on the next Defense Minister who will need to battle with the entrenched interests of the Presidency and its allies. We will continue to work with the new CHOD and use our assistance programs as a lever to secure progress on our key priorities: expanding Bulgarian participation in overseas deployments and increasing the number and quality of deployable and NATO-interoperable Bulgarian military assets across all three services.

McEldowney